

***Balclutha* Stop**

#22 A World of Interconnection

In this episode, we'll consider how the sailing ship *Balclutha* helped to connect the world.

A steel ship built to sail the world's most treacherous seas, the idea for the *Balclutha* began with a carved, wooden model, a little more than five feet in length. Robert McMillan commissioned the construction of *Balclutha* in 1886, the year his son William turned 10 years old. Robert had grown up in his grandfather's and father's shipyard on the Clyde River of Scotland. The ships that Robert McMillan constructed and owned allowed him to build a beautiful family estate with a view of the river for which *Balclutha* was named. For Robert McMillan, the ocean was a vital highway, sustaining the commerce that provided for his family's comfort. His home had a Victorian fireplace in every room.

Balclutha also helped to build San Francisco and California. She carried cement and glass from Belgium that became office buildings. She carried coal from England that heated homes and fueled the trains, steamboats, and factories of the growing economy. California's economy was growing because *Balclutha* was one of thousands of ships that sparked a second "gold rush" for the coveted golden wheat that made San Francisco a port of world significance in the late 19th century. From India came jute, a vegetable fiber used to make burlap bags. These bags were filled with California grain that *Balclutha* carried 14,000 miles around Cape Horn to England, perhaps becoming bread for the McMillan family.

Balclutha carried more than cargo. She also brought new people and new ideas through the Golden Gate, connecting California with the world. *Balclutha*'s sailors frequently deserted ship in San Francisco, looking for opportunities better than another Cape Horn passage. Other ships brought wave after wave of immigrants, searching for a better life in the new world. These immigrants married and raised children, interweaving their family traditions into the changing culture of California. In the modern day, it's a culture that remains open to new ideas, fostering the creativity to spark the current technological revolution connecting our world more tightly than Robert McMillan may have imagined.

Today, San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park preserves *Balclutha* as a memorial to the men and times of the grand Age of Sail. Her cargo hold carries exhibits that will take you on a journey through time, a journey through her working days on the oceans of the world. Welcome aboard!